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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 KABUL 002465

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TAGS: EAID KDEM PGOV AF

SUBJECT: KHST GOVERNOR PRAISES COALITION/AFGHAN
SECURITY COORDINATION AND ENCOURAGES MORE US INVESTMENT

Classified By: Ambassador William B. Wood for reasons 1.4 (B) and (D).

SUMMARY

¶1. (C) The Ambassador met with Khost Governor Arsala Jamal in Kabul on July 19. Governor Jamal praised the strong coordination between Coalition Forces (CF) and Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF). He also positively assessed his partnership with the PRT. He encouraged more U.S. investment in the province, highlighting the completion of the Khost-Gardez road and reestablishing air service in the province as priorities. The Ambassador said more U.S. aid would be made available in the coming year (approximately USD 50 million). Governor Jamal said Khost-Kabul interaction could be strengthened and that the GoIRoA needs to focus more on rewarding merit. They also discussed cross-border tensions with Pakistan and Governor Jamal's perceptions of the destabilizing motives of other state actors in the region (such as Russia and Iran). END SUMMARY.

SECURITY COOPERATION STRONG; WAZIRISTAN A PROBLEM

¶2. (C) Khost Governor Arsala Jamal described a close partnership in the province with CF across security issues. He noted that the last civilian casualty incident had taken place in October 2006. (COMMENT: A more recent incident occurred in April 2007, but cases have been rare. END COMMENT.) Continued focus on daytime "soft knock" operations and advance coordination with ANSF would help minimize tensions. The Governor's past concerns about the provincial police chief had subsided. Governor Jamal also said that local security officials estimated that 60 percent of IEDs were being reported by villagers, an upward trend.

¶3. (C) The Governor stressed that the largest threat to security in Khost and eastern areas of Afghanistan stemmed from cross-border infiltration from Waziristan, noting that the provincial border was only 36 kilometers from Miram Shah (North Waziristan), home to extremist madrassas. He also stated that visitors traveling by bus to Peshawar could see "three or four places of Taliban concentrations."

He also asserted that the border remained porous, and that key Anti-Coalition Militant leaders were freely transiting the region. The Governor thought that establishing a "magnet" madrassa (Center of Educational Excellence) in Khost would help keep religious students in Afghanistan and thereby avoid exposing them to extremist religious instruction.

KHOST AS AN ECONOMIC MAGNET; CIVIL SOCIETY ACTIVE

¶ 15. (C) Governor Jamal said Khost residents welcomed the PRT's extensive construction activities, which included projects in remote districts. The Governor's top priorities in the coming year include construction of the Khost-Gardez road, set for completion in 2008, and establishing air service to the province (there are currently no plans to construct a new airport or civilian runway alongside FOB Salerno's military runway). The need for air service is acute due to the approximately 80,000 Khost residents who work in the Gulf States.

¶ 16. (C) The Ambassador said that USD 50 million in new aid would be made available to Khost in the coming year, but that balancing needs in Afghanistan against resources presented a consistent challenge. Provincial Council members should also be involved in setting rebuilding priorities, and Khost's Provincial Development Plan (PDP) would be the basis for long-term investment. Governor Jamal stressed that Khost's strategic location and historic ties to Kabul positioned it well for economic growth, including outside investment from Gulf countries such as the UAE. Work on Khost's PDP was progressing well.

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¶ 17. (C) Governor Jamal described Khost's population as comparatively well-educated ("they are not sleeping"), its civil society active (14 unions and other community groups), with Khost University playing a particularly positive role (1,900 students from across the region). While female education remained a challenge, PRT-funded schools would help bridge the gap. The Ambassador stressed the importance of ongoing efforts toward more educational equality. He added that Americans understood issues relating to personal and social values would be the hardest to change, but they remained important goals.

DISCONNECT WITH KABUL; MERITOCRACY MISSING

¶ 18. (C) The Ambassador inquired about relations between Khost officials and the central government. Governor Jamal said that there remained a significant lack of capacity in Kabul ministries and few resource commitments. He also said that government posts should be distributed on the basis of merit rather than tribal or ethnic connections.

¶ 19. (C) Despite the persistent challenges, Governor Jamal remained optimistic about Afghanistan's future. In his view, the Taliban would never again be in a position to retake the government, remarking, "if the Afghan people had two choices now, a return to the Taliban or President Karzai's government, most would support the government." Afghan expectations were nevertheless unrealistic, and international reconstruction efforts had been slow and under-resourced. The Ambassador noted that nation-building efforts in the U.S. had taken many years and that state institutions took time to strengthen. He suggested it might be useful for governors to meet regularly and compare perspectives and experiences. Governor Jamal welcomed the idea.

A COMPLEX NEIGHBORHOOD

¶ 10. (C) Governor Jamal stressed that Afghanistan faced many

regional challenges, with outside governments playing a role in the country's instability. He stressed that Iran had played an unhelpful role since 1990, and Pakistan's motives have long been suspect. The influence of these countries in Afghanistan would require long-term attention from the U.S. and the international community.

COMMENT

¶11. (C) Governor Jamal is effective and has traveled to even Khost's most remote districts. President Karzai has praised the province's progress on security and reconstruction in recent meetings with the governor and various Khost delegations. Jamal's previous work in the NGO community has prepared him well for reconstruction work in a front-line provincial environment. His ability to continue to navigate Khost's fractious local political scene -- there remains a divide between new officials and those who worked alongside the communist government -- will be a more long-term test of his endurance in Khost's slow movement forward. END COMMENT.

WOOD